# West Point Life:

## AN ANONYMOUS COMMUNICATION,

READ BEFORE A PUBLIC MEETING

OF THE

## DIALECTIC SOCIETY,

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY,

MARCH 5, 1859.

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Extract from the Minutes of a meeting of the Dialectic Society, March 12th. 1859.

"On motion, the following committee was appointed to have printed for the use of the Members of the Society, the anonymous communication received on the occasion of a Public Meeting March 5th, 1859.

*Committee.* { CADETS NAT. R. CHAMBLISS.
CHANCY B. REESE.
C. C. PARSONS."

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# WEST POINT LIFE.

West Point Life, I said, should be the subject of this strain ;
Thinking on the matter long, I *strained* my brain in vain.
I reflected, called on some accommodating Muse,
*Mused* in vain, and found them all determined to refuse ;
Chose a noble patron then, and made another move,
Knew our worthy President would a Mæcenas prove,
Do not criticise ; you see this sheet looks now aghast
At the array of beauty where to-night the " 'Di.' is cast."

You're, at first, a " cit," you sport a hat and standing collar,
Seek along the paths of peace the bright, almighty dollar ;
Think you're free, but find you have a " governor " absurd,
Though you are a *citizen*, you're *subject* to his word.
Suddenly you feel a passion rising in your soul,
A military ardor which no one can control.
You hear of West Point School, where they turn great warriors out,
Still you stop and hesitate, on this *Point* there's a doubt.
When you doze in bed that night, you mutter, prate and prattle,
Think you hear a uniform, see drums and wear a battle ;
Dream of bullet buttons, plumes, of ladies' smiles and fun,
Waking in the morning, you are off to Washington.
With nine hundred others on the President you charge ;
Seeing this vast number they say you apply " at large."
Now you show you've many claims and can't be called a meddler,
Prove your great grandfather once, in England, whipped a pedler.

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Your father lived to eighty-five, like many other men,
But having lost his parents, was a helpless orphan then.
Your great great great grandfather died in battle, that's the truth ;
Your great great great grandmother lived ten years without a tooth.
With many others back you come, with glory unannointed,
The President appoints but ten, the rest are dis-appointed.

You next go to your congressman, who's honest, true and just,
He finds you'll pass, 'tis all he wants, you'll not disgrace his trust.
Thinking on your future life, you find your speculations
Interrupted by a mighty list of qualifications,
You get a pen to see if you remember how to write,
A splinter's in your thumb, you may not be pronounced all right ;
You have some corns, and fear with them rejection you may meet,
For many active soldiers have been " found " upon their feet.
How careful and how studious we find the young expectant,
For fear this rigid Board will find a true bill of ejectment ;
Yet soon you see kind sympathy is in their bosoms stored,
And find the proverb true, that " There's a soft side to a *board*."

When landed on the Point, you ask a man where you'll report,
And, ten to one, you'll get from him a withering retort,
He'll say " Subordination, Plebe, of discipline's the root ;
Now you've addressed an old Cadet, forgetting to salute."
He sends you to a room and says, " Report and then come back."
You enter, and discover there none but the old shoe-black ;
Your father's with you all the time—he here begins to croak—
And, judging from his countenance, he doesn't like the joke.
You wander like Telemachus—at last you find the place,
And see the dread Instructor ; Yes ! you meet him face to face ;
He cries, " Now stand, attention ; put your hands close by your pants,
And stand erect, hold up your head. There ! steady ! don't advance !
Turn your toes still farther out, and look straight to the front,
Draw in your chin, throw out your chest. There ! steady ! don't you grunt !"
You hold your head so high that the instructor's lost to view,

And looking at your father, there he "stands attention," too.
Says th' instructor "Where's my pen? This old one does not suit me."
"There it is, sir." "Hold your tongue! you must not talk on duty.
I'm not surprised to see you quail, and flutter like a partridge,
But soldiers' mouths must open only when they tear a cartridge!"
He asks you if you've brought along the articles marked thus, (*)
And when he finds you haven't, raises quite a little fuss.
He wants to know all things you've brought, your clothes of every kind,
You think the gentleman's endowed with an enquiring mind.
You get a broom, some matches, and a bed made up of patches,
Though little did you think such schools could ever have their *matches;*
You know where "matches all are made," and give a knowing sneer—
From what you've seen, you think that place is very far from here.
A comforter you also get, the thing that most you need,
A *comforter!!* It's one of Job's; a sorry one indeed.
"On your return, report yourself," they earnestly exhort you.
Report yourself!!! when twenty men are eager to report you!
You're now assigned to quarters—there deposit bed and broom,
And though in want of shelter, wish for you there was no *room.*
Are these the luxuries on which our senators agree?
You do not fancy this "hot-bed of aristocracy."

The drill-drum beats, so does your heart, and down the stairs you scud,
You slip before you reach the ranks, fall full length in the mud.
Here you have met your first reverse, and give a ghastly grin;
You think your district now could say, "Our candidate's *got in.*"
All over mud, you now demand a *suit* in your distress,
But find for all such slight mishaps they give you no *re-dress.*
How strange you think it when, next night, reported you have been,
In spite of all your efforts, for neglecting to "fall in."
The food you say is scanty, and you do not like the stuff;
Though there's a hen for each of you, you never get *un œuf,* (enough.)

A graduating man sees you, some sidelong glances throws,
Thinks he would like to trade his matress for your suit of clothes.

He says, when coming up to you, all buttoned to the throat,
"Has any one said anything to you about your coat?"
Mistaking him, you say, "Some old Cadets, whose jokes were stale,
Cried after me, when passing by. 'Just see that Shanghai tail!'"
At last you get the matress, and remove it with hard tugs;
Republicans are right who say that here you find *big bugs*.

While reading in your room, absorbed in prison discipline,
You suddenly hear some one knock—jump up, and cry, "Come in."
You find your dread instructor is already in the door,
He says, "Did you give that command to your superior?"
You ask to be forgiven, say you'll never do so more,
You didn't yet know all the "rules and articles of war."

Next day they march you into camp. How pretty it does look!
That you fare the better, you have brought a cookery book,
You get in camp, an old cadet cries, "Come, put up this tent!"
And with the aid he renders you, you're very well content.
You thank him, take possession; when you find that all is done,
He coolly tells you, "Plebe, it's mine; go get some other one,
What you have done is only play; Plebes must make some mistakes."
Foul play, you think it is, in which you've put up all the *stakes*.
To hoist another for yourself your efforts now are bent,
On studying the art of war you find yourself *in-tent*.
You've brought some dozen suits of clothes, but give a solemn look,
To find the space assigned to them is but a cubic foot.
Never mind, you'll soon be great, take Cuba, end your trials,
Then, instead of cubic feet, you'll have some *Cubic* miles.

Now come drills, those long squad drills, upon the scorching plain,
Like people in the desert wilds, your only hope is rain.
Sand gets in your shoes, and rubs and burns like lighted candles,
Wonder why the people in such soil do not wear *sand*als.
Though drums disturb you every hour, you utter not a word,
But think how happy Sir John Moore when "Not a drum was heard."

You probably are six feet high, some officer you dread
Arrests you at the break of day for lying *long* in bed.
Your coat is made, you button it, give one spasmodic cough,
And do not draw another breath until you take it off.
You've heard of senators who make a speech up in great haste,
And long for what they mention, the Cadet's small "wasp-like waist."
How singular the conduct of these wisdom bearing herds
If waists are to be laughed at, it should be their *waste* of words.

July the Fourth at last arrives—you think it rather hard—
When on this day of Liberty, the "Plebes" must go on guard.
You go on post, the night arrives, you scarcely are alive,
But still a lonely watch you're keeping down on "No. 5."
First you like this quiet post, the path's so nicely leveled;
Soon you share the fate of *ham*—that is, you're nicely "deviled."
Bodies vast of men approach, and sound their rude alarms;
From divers punches you receive, you find they all have *arms.*
Baggage wagons, ropes and ghosts upon your post appear,
Teeth begin to chatter, though, of course, it's not through fear.
A spirit white you seize upon and hold it on your post
Until the corporal arrives, when you give up the ghost.
When in a one-wheeled cart you fall, that's moving up behind,
To rapidly desert your post you're forcibly *inclined.*

A storm comes up, the rain comes down and soaks your thin, white pants,
You think they might find better work for "tender hot-house plants."
Now if your pants were made of cloth you wouldn't care a shilling;
But, like your summer afternoons, they're all made up of *drilling.*
Then you say you shall resign—your father says you shan't,
You've entered once the tented field and never shall decamp.
Resolving then to be content, there's no more hesitation—
You find most satisfaction in this kind of *resignation;*
Spartan-like, you stay until encampment has an end,
In this period you find your times begin to mend.
When in the art of soldiery you've once become adepts,

You welcome with a joyous smile the coming of the "Seps."
Those that come before the time are *pre-cepts* for the rest,
Who wait outside till camp breaks up, and think the barracks best.
The first who come walk into camp with quite a lordly step,
For where is found more dignity than in an *August* "Sep."?

The noted "Twenty-ninth" arrives and crowds of folks attend,
For camp, like all things, save a hoop, you find must have an end.
Our honored General-in-Chief is there to see the sights,
Whose valiant arm so often won the victory in our fights.
Some drummers come, all armed with sticks, you know there'll be a fray,
They've come to "beat the General," you plainly hear them say.
Base cowards! you think, thus to attack a man of such great fame,
You'll go and warn him of their threat, immortalize your name.
Running through the crowd in breathless haste, at last you meet him,
Whisper there's a mutiny, some men have come to beat him.
He thinks you joke. Bad joke, says you, that's given you such bother.
Pats your head and says "You'll be a man before your mother."

Camp's broken up, you're broken down, you've come to the belief
You'd like to always be on guard, for there is a *relief*.
Filled with joys of barrack life, a letter home you send,
Soon you find "Of making many books there is no end."
Much study, too, you must admit, when starting out afresh,
Although you call it "boning," is quite weary to the flesh.
You meet new hardships every day, yourself you are beside,
You get a problem in "Descriptive" which you can't describe.
You go to fencing, and we'd think, from punches, wounds and scars,
That you could kill as many men as can the Erie cars.
That this will be no use to you, you often make complaint,
Save at examination, when you want to try a *feint*.
Or when you try to "bugle it" he will not wait on Benz,
You look at your instructor, and would like to take *offence*, (a fence.)
They put you in the "Nursery," that is in Company "B,"
In January, many children *found*lings prove to be.

Those who leave, excuses make, and one will say, though smarter
Than half the fellows in his class, they did not make him marker.
Others say the board's too high, take vessels in the offing,
Cruise in the Gulf, since *men-of-war* are *boarded* there for nothing.

You weather through the year, and find that June's not very far,
Which finally arrives, and you a "Plebe" no longer are.
To leave your gloomy barrack rooms you're summoned by the drum,
And many hearts beat high to think Third Class encampment's come,
When you find you all are men, and are no longer babies,
Think you must devote your whole attention to the ladies.
Go to hops, those charming hops, where all is so exciting,
Sashes red, and buttons bright, black eyes that shoot forth lightning.
As thus you pass your life away, of death you've not a fear,
Though every one should surely know 'tis *hops* that fill the *bier*.
You give a girl your buttons, lace, at last you throw your heart in,
You little think what *flames* will rise when first you go out *sparkin'*.
An angel dressed in crinoline you to her side now becks,
As she must still remain "unknown," we'll have to call her "X."
She occupies one-half the room, the space is more than fair,
If radius we call large R, the area's $\pi R^2$
The rustle of her dress alone would charm ten thousand troops,
Much pleasanter the sound than that of wild Camanche *whoops*.
You blush whene'er "X" looks at you from out that mass of lace,
Which proves that "X" must enter the "expression" of you face.
The music starts, you gently take her in your arms. What bliss!
You now can say you have your "X" in a parenthesis.
"Faster still," she whispers, though you're giddy and half sick,
Your heart which once kept "common time," now moves at "double quick."
Faster yet you're going round, ten "X's" now you see,
She hugs you with her sleeveless arms till you cry "*Bare* with me."
To get yourself from her embrace you'd now give fifty farms,
Says she "Since you're a soldier, you shall have, Sir, *two bare arms*" (to bear arms).
Your head's becoming dizzier, you stagger a good deal,

And what was started as a waltz is ending in a *reel.*
Sash comes down, she steps on it, to fall is now your doom,
And knock down nine militia generals standing in the room.
By deafening sounds of drums the hour of ten is intimated,
All rush madly from the room, "X" is "eliminated."
To marry her you're half inclined, "Shall you not or shall you?"
Half the night you lie awake discussing "X's" value.
Next day you take a walk with her around the famed "Flirtation,"
Find her all false hair, false teeth, false smiles, and affectation.
That she may have an honest heart is still your earnest prayer,
But soon you find the heart no better than the teeth and hair.
While swearing that you love her, and appreciate her charms,
You tell her you're a soldier, she says "But a child in arms."
Others come, and better ones, who stop at the hotel,
Oh! what a tale of broken hearts that old north stoop could tell!
Then come little presents of a kerchief, ribbons, gloves,
And what is prized above the rest, they often give their loves.
Some who sew on handkerchiefs, what shall we say of them?
When questioned what they're working at will simply say "*A-hem.*"

Another "Twenty-ninth" arrives, the camp again is struck,
This time you go out quietly, and have much better luck.
To breaking up the scenes of camp you've serious objections,
For ladies, hops, "Flirtation" walks, give place to conic sections.
Troubles do not leave you here, you must have some, of course,
Strange as you may think it, you must learn to ride a horse.
You have read of bold dragoons that every danger scoff,
Stories do not speak, alas! of troopers falling off.
Nothing on your feet but shoes, the horses bare-backed all,
How will ever you obey the "*Boots* and *Saddle* call?"
Many books have you toiled through, all written by great sages,
Do not you deserve a pair, if spurs are won by *pages?*
Now you "stand to horse," and say you'll not get in a fright,
Still you ask a soldier if he thinks your horse will bite.
Then you mount, a thing that you before have never tried,

Make a mighty effort—landing on the other side.
Finally you get your seat, the other troopers follow,
Horse's back 's a catenary, you are in the hollow.
When seated in this valley, the instructor's heard to say,
Like Joseph to his brethren, "Do not fall out, by the way."
Horses move, the riders too, and things look queer to you,
Seldom have you seen the world from such a point of view.
And when your horse begins to trot, you think he's not so tame,
You're not much of a rider, but a good boy in the *mane*.
Reaching back, you make a grab, and clinch with every nail,
Think you'd be relieved to have the burden of his *tail*.
Speed increases, though you pull, they say "It's all your fault, Sir!"
Can't call this a *bridle* tour, before you is the (*h*)*alter*.
Your instructor sees you bounce, until your cheeks look floppy,
Thinks you've ridden on the course, how nicely you can "jockey."
Looking round, you see your friends are now disposed to banter,
Think you'll get another horse, yours doesn't pace nor canter.
Suddenly he takes the gallop; horrors!!! what a motion!
Movement comes from front to rear like waves upon the ocean.
Soon you're told he gallops wrong, to make him change the step,
Teach him then as you've been taught, by loudly crying "Hep!"
All your efforts are in vain, and forth your mutterings burst,
Still looking out for "No. 1," he "puts his best foot first,"
And by using gentle means his favor can't be courted,
Wonder why, instead of you, the horse is not reported.
Getting sea sick, now you roll from one side to the other,
How you wish you'd never left the fire-side of your mother.
A whip is cracked, the horse's head goes down, and you go up,
And from the rate of travel think that in the skies you'll sup.
Up you go till near the roof, but do not reach the skies,
Think you are an aeronaut, but surely are not *Wise*.
What goes up comes down again, and you with looks not placid,
Are making crude experiments in tasting tannic acid.
A *spring* some call this, some a *fall*, and some a *summer*-set,

A *season*able joke is heard to come from each cadet.
Limping out, you start for home, and think you've earned your salary,
Meet with sympathizing looks from ladies in the gallery.
With your lady friends up there you've fallen half in love,
All cadets have learned to set their hearts on "things above."
To take a gallop in the hall again you would not dare,
Although you would not hesitate to take a *gal up* there.
Some will say that riding's fun, such views you can't endorse,
Say you'll never ride again save on a hobby horse.

Now you think of other things, for home you soon will go,
That period of bliss to spend that's called Cadet furlough.
Furlough clothes you then get on, demerit you get off,
Donning thus a suit of blue, the gray you gladly doff.
When you've reached the city, and arrived at your hotel,
Heedless of expenses, you are bound to "cut a swell."
See a class-mate followed round by boys, at least a score,
Say he shan't surpass you, so you hire twenty more.
If his train of little boys has each a dirty face,
Make your own roll in the mud, determined to keep pace.
Though you know your leave is not to leave the States, you do,
Heedless of the consequences, Jersey you pass through.
Hurrying along as happy as a man can be,
Never do you stop until your cherished home you see.
Home! the dear old place whence all your boyish pleasures came,
Who is there so base as not to bless the sacred name?
When, at last, you enter, and are by the family met,
With kisses, sobs, embraces, smiles you're instantly beset.

Now you first appreciate this serving Uncle Sam,
Urchins in the street all cry "Oh! there's a soger man."
Meeting some old fogy friends, they say "Why, how d'ye do?
Tell us how at Western P'int they put you fellers through."
"Well," you say, "it is but right that of it I should speak,
Laboring both day and night we eat but once a week.

Then the fare at mess is such, that when we get our share,
Cattle could not eat it, you can scarcely call it *fair*.
They load us in a cannon if in ranks we do but cough,
Saying when they light the match 'This time we'll *let you off*.' "
Thinking you're from Utah, an old lady at you sings,
"Were you badly wounded at the fight at *Eutaw* Springs?"
Ladies make large parties, each an invitation sends,
You're engaged to twenty-seven when the summer ends.
Just before you leave, the twenty-seven round you close,
Begging for a lock of hair, a button off your clothes.
What a fright!!! You've yielded to the charming twenty-seven,
Buttonless your coat, no hair between your head and heaven.
Coat is ruined, buttons gone, no matter, let it pass,
Never were there women seen with such supplies of brass.
Furlough now is nearly gone, and back you take your way,
Feeling that to melancholy you've become a prey.
Furlough time is soon forgot, that life of wild romance,
Though often do you feel for missing pockets in your pants.

Painting now you undertake, although in fifty cases
Your instructor asks you why you *will* paint female faces.
When you ask what paints to use, with countenance growing sadder,
Though he sees you now are mad, he tells you to get *madder*.
You give your brush a dab in any color you can find,
Destroying both your piece of painting and your peace of mind.
Now you find astronomy included in your course,
Though it's of the greatest use, of trouble it's the source.
Here you learn a thousand things unknown in the past,
Thought the Earth went slowly round, but now you find it's *fast*.
Though there're mountains in the moon, of trees there's not a mark,
Save when dogs look at it, when we often notice *bark*.
Soon, alas! you feel within you all your former dread,
When you're told that with your sabre you must cut a head.
Others cut at those on posts, that fall without a groan,
You, who scorn such artifice, would rather cut your own.

Making once a mighty cut, you pay for it quite dear,
Horse and you both tumble down, though holding by his ear.
When you rise you find that this is rather a bad throw,
Limping from the hall, to the hospital you must go.
Though such *hospital*-ity you hate, you have to try it,
Saying you can't live it through, they tell you you must *diet*.
Here you stay till muster day, with many others clustered,
Matrons, stewards, attendants, like your blisters then are *mustered*.

Soon you're out, for wounds like these cannot your ardor damp,
Then we find you entering the famous First Class Camp.
Last encampment! what a sound! there's magic in the word!
But you're now so dignified rejoicing were absurd.
You become a creature who must henceforth be a star,
Not approached by common men, but gazed at from afar.
Knowledge vast is in your brain, you know what "enfilade" is,
How to get ten "lates" a day, and how to please the ladies.
First Class Camp, that trying time! you scarcely would believe it,
He's indeed a lucky man who unengaged can leave it.
Soon you're smitten with a face, for you now comes the rub,
How you wish a month before you'd joined the "Bachelor Club."
Graceful form, coquettish smiles, she cannot help exposing,
Do not think I mean to joke by saying she's *imposing*.
She swears by all the gods of love she'll smile on none but you,
Say all this in innocence, which in-no-sense is true.
Soon she leaves; with tearful eyes you see her to the carriage,
Looking in the "Herald," two weeks after, there's her marriage.

Finally the camp breaks up; you say farewell to tents,
Leaving such a dwelling-house no soldier e'er repents.
Barrack life again commenced, you exercise your skill,
In finding out the surest means your fellow men to kill.
Treat a foe humanely, you are told, though try to beat,
If to *treat* he should refuse, you never must *re-treat*.

What a sight, from stooping over desks, you now present !
You, who once were so erect, are now on study *bent*.

Soon a longing for excitement in your bosom dwells,
Think you'd like to "run it," so you take a trip to "Spell's."
You suppose there's little danger, that the road is clear,
Till you meet an officer ; there's then some cause for fear.
He seizes you, you lose all power, and stand fixed to the ground,
He asks you what you're doing there, you tell him you're *Spell-bound*.
Home you go, for on this subject no more hints you need,
Punishment you know will follow closely on the deed.

Anxious thoughts are soon *dispelled*, and now you change your tune,
Thinking only of the fact, "You'll graduate in June."
You get measured for your clothes, a bran new uniform,
Three times a day you try it on, evening, noon and morn.
You get a regulation hat, a sabre, too, and belt,
The hat you find is like the want of beauty in it—*felt*,
One regret you deeply feel, you still have no moustache,
Though on your upper lip you've used 'most every kind of trash.
Some friends pronounced tricopherous the best they ever saw,
You seize upon it like a drowning man upon a straw.

The last three months seem like a year, how slowly time does fly !
You find it only April when it ought to be July.
June, at last, arrives, which is to end your labors here,
You're to get a "parchment," of all things to you most dear.
The Board will rise 'midst banners, flags, and your diplomas hand ye,
With "Hail Columbia," "Auld Lang Syne," and "Yankee Doodle Dandy."
Joy intoxicates you, all your sorrows now have fled,
Scarcely do you know if you are on your heels or head.
The day arrives which has so often many happy made,
When you put on your "fixings" to attend your last parade.
How proud you feel when marching to the "Sergeant Dashing White,"

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Returning on your "winding way," you're prouder still that night.
You say to all your friends from whom yourself you now must tear,
If of your home they come within two miles, they must stop *there*.
A parting word, a warm embrace you give to each class-mate,
And bid the Point a long farewell, a happy GRADUATE.